

to understand that there is no time to build new organizations. We must repair what we have, building on our considerable remaining assets in an effort to protect the most vulnerable Americans and to restore some decency to our domestic political life.

ROGER WILKINS

Slam-Dunked

The fact that a documentary film like *Hoop Dreams* could haul 'em in at the mall alongside *Dumb and Dumber* should gladden the hearts of the film-industry pharaohs, who have discovered that the audiences they assume walk on all fours will rise to a splendid occasion if given the chance. More than 100 critics, film societies and review boards put *Hoop Dreams* on their lists of the year's ten best films—not just documentary films. Its distributor, Fine Line Features, unapologetically pushed to have *Hoop Dreams* considered in the Academy's top category along with the Gumps and the Pulp. Instead, the film was nominated in neither slot, getting a nod only for Film Editing. In the documentary-filmmaking community nationwide, artists as diverse as Barbara Kopple, Pamela Yates and Charles Guggenheim have expressed distress that the Academy chose to ignore *Hoop Dreams*. The *Los Angeles Times*'s Kenneth Turan has suggested that if the documentary committee members "knew the meaning of the word shame they would now be making arrangements for group suicide." The explanation for an oversight so egregious? Says Walter Shenson, vice chairman of the documentary committee: "Democracy is painful."

Democracy, of course, has nothing to do with it. Many in the industry feel *Hoop Dreams*'s critical and popular success actually soured its chances with the Academy nominators. Mitchell Block, longtime member of the Academy's documentary committee (a group comprising a few nonfiction filmmakers and a great many Hollywood bureaucrats with no connection to documentary film), describes the difference between this public acclaim and the opinions of the forty-seven voters at the Academy as "a case of apples versus oranges." In other words, O masses, you can feel your souls lifted and your minds stirred, but only a committee can judge Art. Block also complains that fat-wallet distribution companies such as Fine Line steal attention from works handled by smaller distributors (of which Block is one). Previous choices in this category seem to suggest that Academy voters may punish nonfiction filmmakers who lose their virginity to mainstream distributors by shutting them out on election day.

But there's no rift in the nonfiction filmmaking community, where almost everyone's familiar with the story of Kartemquin Films, the grass-roots Chicago group that made *Hoop Dreams* and that has long been committed to telling the stories of ordinary citizens [see Stuart Klawans, "Films," November 14]. Kartemquin set out seven years ago to follow the growth of Arthur Agee and William Gates, two black Chicago teenagers whose passionate efforts to reach perfection on the basketball court are chronicled from eighth grade through high school graduation. What Kartemquin achieves is something that can stop the heart: life-sized, tightly focused

portraiture, within a sharp-edged frame of hopes dreamed amid economic depredation, racial discrimination and the international drug cartel's venture capitalism. *Hoop Dreams* blasts through conventional wisdom about "the underclass" with examples of how people with no connections to privilege summon monumental stores of faith and stamina to achieve—or not—what other citizens can have simply because of where and to whom they were born. Day-in-day-out documentarians know what kinds of nonbankable conviction it takes to begin work on such a huge chronicle with no one throwing money at you (if not for a \$2,000 state arts council grant, the project could not even have gotten off the ground).

Ironically, the *Hoop Dreams* debate threatens to leave in the shadows those films that were nominated. *Freedom on My Mind*, *A Great Day in Harlem*, *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter*, *D-Day Remembered* and *Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision* should not be penalized because the Academy needs to smarten up.

The solution is twofold: First, the Academy's Documentary category should be judged by people in the field, as is done in every other specialty category of the Academy, from editing to sound effects. Second, there should be recognition that this country's great independent documentary filmmaking tradition is profoundly tied to a sense of place, and that place is not Hollywood. The Academy's documentary committee must be restructured to insure that its membership includes nonfiction film professionals from across the country.

Academy snub notwithstanding, *Hoop Dreams* inhabits the landscape like a cathedral, with the grace and power to take one's breath and seize one's brain. MARGARET SPILLANE

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CLINTON & CO. *Brown | Redwain* *Comm 155472* Spooked Again



Slowly, President Clinton has begun to draw lines. Expanded college loans, national service, the assault rifle ban, the 100,000 new police officers—he vows he will not permit the Republican Congress to vote them away. He has even stiffened his backbone relative to Surgeon General nominee Henry Foster. But this crazy quilt of make-my-day stands does not constitute an assault on Gingrichism, and Clinton's toadying to Wall Street on the Mexican bailout undermines his claim of loyalty to the middle class. With the exception of the N.R.A., he will not challenge potent interests. Witness his near-total capitulation to the national security class.

Clinton can't say no to the military-intelligence complex. He refuses to consider a reshaping of the made-in-the-cold-war military. He declines to rein in arms exports. He has done little to promote change within the intelligence community.

When Clinton recently introduced retired Air Force Gen. Michael Carns, his nominee as Director of Central Intelligence, he dished out the usual blather about the "decisive" and "important" work done by the C.I.A. Carns declared

that his first priority was to bolster the morale of the "fine people" in the intelligence community: "Their achievements must be recognized and rewarded."

Both Clinton and Carns uttered the obligatory remarks about the need to reconfigure the agency, but neither hinted that serious action looms. That's because the President has punted. Rather than assume the herculean task of remaking the C.I.A. and its related services, Clinton has set up a congressionally mandated commission to *study* the future of the intelligence apparatus. In the meantime, Carns is not likely to unsettle the intelligence establishment. House Republican freshmen took only a few weeks to cook up schemes to abolish or radically alter the departments of Education, Energy, Labor and HUD. The intelligence commission will ponder for a year and a half, and its composition will reassure those who desire little or no action.

The President named nine of the seventeen commissioners, including the chairman and vice chairman: Les Aspin, the former Congressman who blew his chance as Secretary of Defense, and Warren Rudman, the former Republican Senator. Other Clinton appointees include three former senior officials of the ultra-secretive National Security Agency and Paul Wolfowitz, Under Secretary of Defense in the Bush Administration. In 1990 Wolfowitz was criticized by Aspin, then chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, for preparing an out-of-date four-year defense planning guide that was "not very useful." The year before, Sam Nunn accused him of sitting on an intelligence report that found that it would take the Soviet Union three times longer to prepare for an attack in Europe than had been previously estimated. In 1991, a proposal from his office to sell advanced short-range air-to-air missiles to Israel had to be killed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who feared the technology would spread throughout the Middle East.

Clinton also enlisted corporate attorney Anthony Harrington, general counsel to the Clinton/Gore campaign and a founder of the Center for Democracy, a foreign policy institute that has shown a fondness for aiding conservatives overseas. (In 1992 Harrington approved paying \$37,500 to a campaign worker who had accused Clinton's buddy David Watkins of sexual harassment; he called the payoff a consulting fee.) The President also turned to Stephen Friedman, who retired last year as the \$30 million-a-year chairman of Goldman Sachs (when the firm's earnings were down), and Zoë Baird, another corporate lawyer, who was nannied out of the Attorney General post.

Congressional Democrats were no more imaginative. They placed on the panel Norman Dicks, the ranking Democrat on the House intelligence committee, former Senator Wyche Fowler, a Georgia liberal defeated in 1992, Senator James Exon, who chairs the subcommittee on arms control and defense intelligence, and Tony Coelho, the former House whip who resigned under a junk-bond-related cloud. As a senior Democratic Party pooh-bah, he presided over the party's worst election in forty-two years. Now he will apply his analytic abilities to the C.I.A.

The most intriguing commission member was selected by Bob Dole. In October, former President Bush wrote Dole to

recommend David Dewhurst for the job. Dewhurst, Bush observed, "definitely is not one who wants to see the CIA . . . ripped asunder." Dewhurst, who owns an energy company in Houston, is a member of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, a hawkish, pro-Israel group. He is major-domo of the Texas G.O.P. and a prime backer of Governor George W. Bush. (Last year, several Argentine legislators alleged that his father, former President Bush, had promoted the business interests of Dewhurst's company in Argentina.) In the 1970s, Dewhurst was a C.I.A. case officer and served in Bolivia. In 1971 a rightist military leader overthrew the leftist President, Juan José Torres, in a coup with C.I.A. backing, according to unsubstantiated U.S. media reports. Dewhurst declined to talk about his C.I.A. days—or anything else.

The Republicans did choose the one commissioner with experience as a victim of the national security state. Robert Pursley, a senior Pentagon official in the 1960s and '70s, earned an F.B.I. wiretap for his opposition to Henry Kissinger's Vietnam policies. These days Pursley is a defense consultant. Other G.O.P. appointments are Senator John Warner, who originated the idea of the commission, and Representative Porter Goss, another past C.I.A. officer.

The deck is loaded. The Clinton/Gore Reinventing Government Revival will pass right by the C.I.A. Clinton will not accept the mission impossible of reforming the spooks.

DAVID CORN

★ CONFLICT

The G.O.P.s

are eager to show

They're patriots,

which means, as we know,

They'll give Defense

a bundle of dough—

Enough, by far,

to crush any foe.

They say more arms

are vital, although

They also say

they're loath to bestow

Their votes on send-

ing troops abroad. No!

Their plan will mean,

it seems: G.I. Joe

Is all armed up,

with no place to go.

Calvin Trillin